

An analysis of prone to deviant behaviour and coping strategies among school-age athletes

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Abstract

Objective of the study is to identify tendencies towards deviant behaviour and coping strategies among student athletes involved in cyclic sports and martial arts.

Methods and structure of the study. An empirical study was conducted involving 136 students (99 males and 37 females) aged 17–19. All respondents were first-year university students in St Petersburg who were actively involved in sporting activities and participating in competitions. Standardised psychodiagnostic methods were used to collect data: the 'Predisposition to Deviant Behaviour' questionnaire and the 'Coping Behaviour in Stressful Situations' method. This empirical study examined the propensity for deviant behaviour and coping strategies among student athletes representing cyclic sports and martial arts.

Results and conclusions. Significant differences were identified between the groups. Martial arts athletes demonstrate more pronounced non-conformity of attitudes and aggression, a moderate risk of addictive behaviour, and reduced volitional control. In turn, representatives of cyclic sports are characterised by conformity, low aggression, and high volitional control. Athletes in cyclic sports more often resort to problem-focused coping and seeking social support, and less frequently use emotion-focused strategies and avoidance. Combat sports athletes tend to choose emotion-focused coping and avoidance strategies, whilst seeking social support less frequently.

Keywords: *deviant behaviour, coping strategies, athletes, student age, analysis.*

Introduction. In the context of today's socio-cultural reality, the issue of deviant behaviour has become particularly pressing, manifesting itself in various social groups, including among students involved in sporting activities. [1, 6, 9]. On the one hand, physical education and sport are traditionally regarded as an effective tool for preventing deviant behaviour, contributing to the formation of socially acceptable behavioural models. On the other hand, the increased demands of training and participating in sporting competitions can create conditions for the development of attitudes that permit the violation of generally accepted norms of behaviour in the pursuit of success [3, 4, 5].

Studying the propensity for deviant behaviour and the predominant coping strategies among stu-

dents will help to determine which methods of coping with stress contribute to students' successful adaptation and which, conversely, provoke maladaptive forms of behaviour [7, 8, 10].

Objective of the study is to identify tendencies towards deviant behaviour and coping strategies among student athletes involved in cyclic sports and martial arts.

Methods and structure of the study. The study involved 136 student athletes (99 male and 37 female) aged 17–19. All participants were first-year students from various faculties at universities in St Petersburg, actively involved in competitive sports in cycling disciplines (62 students) and martial arts (74 students).

Research methods: 1) the 'Propensity for Deviant Behaviour' (PDB) questionnaire (A.N. Orel, K.V.



Sugonyaev), designed to assess an individual's predisposition to various forms of deviant behaviour. Key measured parameters: the scale of attitude towards socially desirable responses (service scale); propensity to violate norms and rules, predisposition to addictive behaviour, tendencies towards self-harming and self-destructive behaviour, propensity towards aggression and violence, level of volitional control over emotional reactions, propensity towards delinquent behaviour.

2) The 'Coping Behaviour in Stressful Situations' (CISS) methodology (N. Endler, J. Parker; adapted by T.L. Kryukova) identifies dominant strategies for coping with stress and includes the following types of strategies: problem-oriented (aimed at actively resolving the problematic situation); emotion-oriented (focused on experiencing and expressing emotions caused by stress); avoidance strategies (manifested in denial or evasion of the problem); distraction strategies (involving shifting attention to other activities); strategies for seeking social support (involving seeking help from close and significant others) [2].

Results of the study and discussion. An analysis of predisposition to various forms of deviant behaviour, conducted using the PDB methodology, revealed significant differences between participants in cyclic sports (Group 1) and combat sports (Group 2).

Social desirability bias. Both groups of students demonstrated similar scores on the social desirability scale: 88.2% of respondents showed an average degree of willingness to present themselves in a favourable light, reflecting a natural need to appear 'normal' in the eyes of society. A high tendency to provide socially desirable answers was demonstrated by 11.7% of students.

Non-conformity and aggression. In the martial arts group, the proportion of students with non-conformist attitudes is significantly higher: high scores on the scale of tendency to violate norms and rules are found in 8.8% of martial artists and 5.9% of athletes in cyclic sports, on the scale of propensity for aggression and violence – high scores were found in 11.8% of martial artists and 2.9% of athletes in cyclic sports.

It is evident that high scores for non-conformist attitudes and a tendency towards aggression are linked to the specific nature of combat sports, which require autonomy in decision-making under condi-

tions of acute stress, a readiness for confrontation and the demonstration of strength, and the development of competitive aggression as a means of victory. Among martial arts students, 32.1% scored low on the scale of transgressing norms and rules, and 18.8% showed a low level of propensity for aggression.

In the group of cyclic sports, 52.9% of students showed low scores on the scale of transgressing norms and rules, and 58.8% showed a low level of propensity for aggression. It is evident that adherence to a plan and monotonous work towards a result, characteristic of cyclic sports, are more likely to foster conformist attitudes.

Addictive patterns and self-regulation. Combat sports athletes demonstrate a higher risk of addictive behaviour (8.2% with high scores compared to 3.5% among athletes in cyclic sports), greater emotional lability (5.9% with high scores on the self-harm behaviour scale compared to 2.9%), and reduced volitional control (29.4% with low levels compared to 17.6%), due to the need for instant reactions in combat, where reflection is secondary. Combat sports athletes more frequently demonstrate moderate signs of delinquent tendencies (in 57.3% of respondents).

In cyclic sports, a moderate tendency towards escapism is more frequently observed (66.2% of athletes with moderately elevated addiction scores), likely manifested through intense physical exertion as a means of 'switching off' from problems. The identified moderate scores on the addiction (60.3% of respondents) and delinquency (32.6%) scales indicate a moderate tendency to seek alternative ways of regulating emotional states and an orientation towards hedonistic values (the pursuit of pleasure and novel sensations). This does not imply the presence of delinquent patterns, but signals the need for preventive measures in conditions of heightened stress. High levels of volitional control were identified in 36.1% of athletes in cyclic sports.

The average scores on the scale of volitional control of emotional reactions among the majority of martial arts students (66.1%) ensure sufficient emotional resilience to everyday stressors and volitional control, but do not rule out the risk of emotional burnout, particularly during prolonged stress: 18.3% of martial arts students demonstrate high scores on the emotional reaction control scale.

A comparative analysis using the Mann-Whitney



U-test revealed statistically significant differences in the choice of coping strategies between student athletes in cyclic sports (Group 1) and martial arts (group 2).

Problem-focused coping is the dominant mechanism in group 1: students focus on analysing the situation, planning actions and seeking constructive solutions. The mean scores for coping choice in Group 1 were $M=28.4$ ($SD=3.2$), which is statistically significantly higher than in Group 2 ($M=19.7$, $SD=4.1$; $U=112.5$, $p=0.007$). Clearly, the identified differences are linked to the characteristics of the training process in cyclic sports, where success depends directly on discipline, long-term planning and the sequence of training loads.

The coping strategy of seeking social support also occupies a significant place in the structure of coping behaviour among members of Group 1. The mean score on this scale is $M=24.8$ ($SD=2.9$), which is significantly higher than the scores for Group 2 ($M=16.3$, $SD=3.7$; $U=134.2$, $p=0.009$). This strategy contributes to greater emotional stability and enables the identification of rational solutions in stressful situations. The infrequent use of the strategy of seeking social support among martial arts students is likely due to the values of autonomy and self-sufficiency cultivated in the martial arts environment, where athletes must make decisions independently during combat and take responsibility for them.

In Group 1, the identified low level of emotion-focused strategies and avoidance coping indicates a low level of impulsive reactions, a tendency to overcome difficulties through purposeful actions rather than by avoiding them. On the emotionally oriented coping scale, Group 1 scored $M=12.1$ ($SD=2.4$) – significantly lower than Group 2 ($M=21.5$, $SD=3.3$; $U=98.7$, $p=0.003$). Scores for avoidance strategies were also minimal: $M=8.3$ ($SD=1.8$) versus $M=17.9$ ($SD=2.6$) in Group 2 ($U=87.4$, $p=0.001$).

In Group 2 (martial arts athletes), the prevalence of emotion-focused coping and avoidance strategies in stressful situations (avoiding the problem through denial, daydreaming or distraction) indicates that martial arts athletes tend to focus on regulating their own emotions (suppression, reaction, emotional release) rather than on solving the problem. This may be linked to the high emotional intensity of competitive activity and the need to rapidly release emotional tension. In situations of acute stress, this may provide short-term relief, but in the

long term it reduces adaptability and increases the risk of maladaptive behaviour.

Using Pearson's correlation analysis, statistically significant correlations were identified between deviant behaviour and the coping strategies employed by student-athletes in the overall study sample.

The study revealed a negative correlation (at $p \leq 0.05$) between social desirability and maladaptive coping ($r = 0.295$ for emotion-focused coping and $r = 0.300$ for avoidance). The stronger the desire to appear 'correct' in the eyes of others, the less frequently students resort to emotional reactions and avoidance of problems. This confirms the protective role of social desirability as a factor that restrains impulsive and unconstructive reactions.

It was found that the higher a student's propensity for any form of deviant behaviour, the greater the likelihood of choosing emotion-focused coping ($r = 0.342$, at $p \leq 0.05$).

A negative correlation was found between a tendency towards addictive behaviour and the use of problem-oriented coping ($r = -0.272$, $p \leq 0.05$): the higher the tendency towards addictive behaviour, the lower the tendency to use problem-oriented coping strategies.

A strong positive correlation was found between avoidance-oriented coping and all scales of the PDB questionnaire (except for the first service scale): the higher the tendency towards any type of deviant behaviour, the greater the likelihood of choosing an avoidance-oriented coping strategy.

Conclusions. Most students demonstrate a moderate tendency towards deviant behaviour.

The study's findings confirm that the type of sporting activity has a significant influence on the development of behavioural attitudes and stress-coping strategies. The specific nature of training and competition shapes consistent patterns of behaviour: in cyclic sports, adaptive, rational strategies (analysis, planning, reliance on support) become established, whilst in combat sports, emotionally charged and avoidance tactics are more frequently used, reflecting the need for rapid emotional release and independence in decision-making.

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